

A Woman's Right to Choose

I have been committed to protecting the Supreme Court's decision in *Roe v. Wade* by maintaining a 100 percent pro-choice voting record. I believe that the decision to have an abortion is between a woman and her doctor, not the government. I support abortions that are rare, safe, and legal. And, we must ensure that those men and women who provide these services are protected from violence and intimidation.

In May 2004, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) imposed further restrictions on woman's reproductive rights. Acting as a political agency for the Bush administration, they refused to make emergency contraceptives – popularly known as the morning-after pill – available over the counter. This decision was made in direct contradiction to the agency's own experts' recommendation that the pill was both safe and effective. The experts additionally found that giving it over-the-counter status would prevent thousands of abortions each year and would greatly reduce unintended and unwanted pregnancies.

I have also voted against the 2003 law that banned “partial-birth abortion” because these abortions are rarely performed and only in cases of fatal fetal anomalies or threat to the life of the mother. In this tragic circumstance, this procedure is for many women the safest medical option and the best hope to save the life and future fertility of the mother. The so called “partial-birth abortion” legislation that does not allow exceptions to protect the mother's health is completely unacceptable.

Thankfully, the Obama administration is dedicated to preserving a woman's right to choose while supporting measures that will decrease the number of unwanted pregnancies. In January 2009, President Obama reversed the Bush administration's policy by lifting the ban on federal funding for international groups that promote or perform abortions.

Unfortunately, the new Republican majority in the House of Representatives is taking our nation in a strong anti-choice direction, focusing on taking away Americans' access to basic health care services and threatening the health of millions of women.

The repeal of health care reform in the House followed by the introduction of H.R. 3, the so-called *No-Taxpayer Funding for Abortion Act*, is unconscionable. Current law already bans federal funds from being used for abortion services under the Hyde Amendment, and health plans receiving federal funds must segregate them from those used for abortion services. H.R.

3 would further restrict women's access to reproductive services by prohibiting the use of funds authorized or appropriated by federal law for any abortion, as well as for any health benefits coverage that includes abortion. It would impose a number of burdensome tax penalties and limit the exceptions for which abortions can be provided to forcible rape, incest with a minor, and when a woman's life is endangered. I do not believe that Congress or the courts have a right to place restrictions on a woman's Constitutionally-protected freedom of choice.

On February 19, 2011, I joined several of my colleagues in signing onto a letter addressed to Speaker Boehner expressing our opposition to H.R. 217, the *Title X Abortion Provider Prohibition Act*, a bill that would prohibit community health centers from receiving Title X family planning funds if they separately provide abortion care with private funds. This legislation is clearly intended to prevent Planned Parenthood and other women's health centers from receiving this critical funding stream, thus barring millions of women from accessing basic primary care.

These pieces of legislation will hurt millions of women, especially low-income communities and minorities. Rest assured that I will continue to defend a woman's right to choose and do everything in my power to oppose the passage of H.R. 3, H.R. 217, and any other anti-choice legislation. Improving the health and well-being of all women and girls is my priority. I will also continue to support legislative efforts that help increase access to the health care services and information that women need and deserve.

Economic Equality

The prevalence of gender discrimination continues to permeate society and leave millions of women disenfranchised, exploited, and without adequate, fulfilling employment opportunities.

In fact, from November 2009 to November 2010, men gained 126,000 manufacturing jobs, while women lost 18,000. Meanwhile, men have made even greater gains in professional business services: 278,000 new jobs, compared with 103,000 for women. In trade, transportation, and utilities, men gained 245,000 jobs while women lost 74,000. In administrative and waste services, men gained 231,000 and women gained only 137,000.

Women continue to struggle for basic rights and equal treatment. Their salaries and career advancements remain significantly lower than their male counterparts. On average, women earn 77 cents for every dollar men make. Women of color make the least in comparison to other groups of people. Women also remain vastly underrepresented as major political leaders and top business executives.

I am committed to improving women's lives, empowering them in the workforce, and ending gender inequality. I am a proud cosponsor of a resolution that would remove the deadline for the ratification of the equal rights amendment. The amendment, which passed Congress in 1972 but failed to be ratified by 38 states, would guarantee equal rights to men and women throughout the United States and every place subject to its jurisdiction. I am also a cosponsor of the *International Women's Freedom Act*, which advances tools to empower women on a global level, and a cosponsor of a resolution urging the United States to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In the 111th

Congress, I was an original co-sponsor of the *Paycheck Fairness Act*

which passed the House of Representatives on January 9, 2009. The legislation amended the *Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938* to provide more effective remedies to victims of discrimination in the payment of wages on the basis of sex.

Ending Racism

While people of color generally continue to face socio-economic inequalities in the 21st century, women of color often bear the major part of these inequities. The truth is that women of color have had to confront and overcome double oppression - racism and sexism. As a result, they are often subjected to unequal treatment, unequal pay, and unequal lives to their white male and white female counterparts. This concept is repulsive and must be stopped.

For example, African American and Hispanic women are 2.5 times more likely to be steered into a more costly home mortgage loan than white women. Women of color are incarcerated at a rate of 3.7 times that of white women.

I strongly believe that a legislative sweep for women's equal pay and equal treatment will give women of color an immediate economic boost. Further, I recently hosted a Congressional staff briefing which highlighted the prevalence and perverse impact of housing and lending discrimination on minority women, especially those with children. I have also worked tirelessly to put an end to racial profiling and other criminal justice issues which disproportionately affect women of color.

Violence against women

Nearly one in three women globally will be beaten, raped, mutilated or otherwise abused during their lifetimes. Violence against women not only defies their basic human rights, but also negatively impacts a woman's physical, mental and reproductive health. Furthermore, this violence threatens the overall health and development of families and communities.

Throughout my time in Congress, I have fought to protect victims of violence regardless of race, creed, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, status, or gender. In 1993, during my first term in the House of Representatives, I co-sponsored the *Violence Against Women Act*. In the 111th Congress, I was a co-sponsor of the

International Violence Against Women Act

, which would coordinate U.S. efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women and girls by developing culturally competent strategies that prevent violence against women, and integrating the empowerment of women into U.S. foreign policy and assistance programs. I look forward to voting in favor of this legislation should it be re-introduced in the 112th

Congress.

While we laud these accomplishments, work still remains in areas of prevention and eradication. Girls and women remain the main targets of violence, intimidation, and trafficking.

Cutting-edge programs must be developed to tackle the issues of domestic violence, sexual harassment and rape. Educating our communities about ways they can prevent and rid society of this plague is essential.